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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [IT](#) [NATO](#) [AFGHANISTAN](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY/AFGHANISTAN: CONTRIBUTIONS TO ISAF EXPANSION

REF: STATE 50477

Classified By: POL MINCOUNS THOMAS COUNTRYMAN, REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Italy remains fully on board with ISAF expansion. Although no formal policy decision has yet been made, the GOI (reportedly working closely with SHAPE) is focused on Herat, with the only apparent question being whether Italy will lead only a PRT, or that and a Forward Support Base (FSB), as well. (A letter from DSACEUR to Italy's CHOD evidently requests both.) Both MOD and MFA interlocutors emphasized concerns about equipment support needed to lead an FSB. They indicate that there is an informal understanding with SHAPE that they would not be expected to offer a concrete "pledge" at the March 11 Force Generation conference, which, they explained, would focus on Stage 1; Italy's contributions would come into play in Stage 2. Italy is no longer interested in a Ghazni PRT. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) Pol-Mil Couns, accompanied by Poloff, delivered reftel points to MFA Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Ambassador Enrico De Maio, and to NATO Office Director, Cons. Giovanni Brauzzi, on March 8. Pol-Mil Couns also raised them in a separate conversation with the Defense Minister's Diplomatic Adviser, Minister Francesco Trupiano. Our interlocutors cautioned that no final GOI decision has yet been made, but both discussions found Italian planning for GOI contributions to ISAF expansion well underway, focusing on a PRT in Herat, with serious attention being given also to leading a Forward Support Base there.

3. (C) GOI representatives are in close contact with SHAPE; Trupiano and Brauzzi said DSACEUR sent a written request to Italy's CHOD requesting Italy lead a "PRT and FSB" in Herat. (Although the NATO request was reportedly straightforward, some confusion remained in the MFA as to whether the U.S. specifically sought a PRT, an FSB, or both.) Irritation at the USG's abrupt turn-around on Italy's Ghazni PRT seems to have diminished, if not disappeared completely; some nervousness about the possibility of another about-face remains. De Maio and Brauzzi requested specific USG confirmation that Italian leadership in Herat was in line with USG planning. All/all interlocutors indicated that the GOI is no longer considering Ghazni as a potential PRT location. Italy fully shares the USG's sense of urgency for expanding ISAF as quickly as possible, for the host of political and security reasons applicable.

4. (C) MFA interlocutors confided that there are concerns in the Italian military that an FSB might be too large and difficult a task, and suggested that the U.S. might help allay those concerns. They told us MFA Secretary General Vattani chaired a March 8 meeting and directed that the GOI would move "in a new direction," apparently in reference to supporting an FSB. Both our MFA and MOD interlocutors raised specific concerns about the full range of assets needed for an FSB, mentioning specifically helicopters and close air support, and suggesting it would be most helpful if U.S. assets could be added to the mix. They underscored that Italy would also need support from other countries. The comments of our interlocutors, however, did not suggest unwillingness, but rather reasonably advanced planning which was revealing the challenges of the task Italy hopes to take on.

5. (C) De Maio and Brauzzi mused about the difference between a "logistical hub" and a full FSB, noting that smaller footprints sometimes might be preferable. Brauzzi and De Maio fully concurred, however, that an FSB would need logistical support and medical evacuation capabilities, among others.

6. (C) MFA representatives highlighted the political sensitivity of an FSB, particularly one in Herat. They underscored the need for flexibility in planning the operation, including by military planners. Would Ismail Khan welcome a large military organization "establishing security" on his turf? Could such an operation potentially destabilize

a currently-stable area? De Maio emphasized the history of GOI cultural contributions in Herat as a strong plus for Italian leadership there. Italy is well and favorably known in Herat, he said. He added that Italy's positive relations with neighboring Iran could also be a plus.

17. (SBU) Trupiano said Italy's newly-appointed Vice CHOD, General Castegnetti, would likely lead Italy's delegation to the March 11 Force Generation conference. In any event, "senior Italian officers" will attend. Both he and the MFA representatives clearly understood that Italy's contributions were being sought for Stage 2, and suggested an understanding already exists with SHAPE that Italy will not play a large role in the Thursday conference.

18. (U) Kabul Minimize considered.  
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